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HD **What the Throne Speech didn't tell you about British Columbia; Instead of a realistic overview or economic blueprint, the document is all about re-electing Liberals**

BY GARY MASON

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VANCOUVER --

A Speech from the Throne opening a fresh session of Parliament is usually a stultifying recitation of all the wonderfully important things a government intends to do over the coming months. When it precedes a general election, however, the focus shifts to all the wonderfully important things the government did to warrant being re-elected.

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As such, the document read out in the British Columbia Legislature Tuesday by Lieutenant-Governor Judith Guichon amounted to a campaign pamphlet for Premier Christy Clark's governing Liberals. A newcomer listening would be excused for thinking the Premier leads the most well-managed, progressive and talented government in the world.

Someone who has lived in the province any length of time might beg to differ.

B.C. names U.S. trade envoy, promises tax relief at home in Throne Speech
(
http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/in-pre-election-throne-speech-bc-says-its-payback-time-for-taxpayers/article34023079/)

Highlights from B.C.'s Speech from the Throne
(
http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/highlights-from-bcs-speech-from-thethrone/article34025312/)

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It would be churlish to suggest Ms. Clark's government has not done anything of value in the intervening time since the last general vote. The Premier has enjoyed the benefit of leading an economy that largely remains the envy of the country; how much credit the Liberals deserve for that is debatable. Nonetheless, it is fair to say her government has not entirely squandered its good fortune.

Next week, the Liberals will table their fifth consecutive balanced budget – aided, unquestionably, by a runaway real-estate market that has bestowed untold riches upon the province in tax revenues, but an impressive feat nonetheless. It is a record of fiscal stewardship that no other government in the country has even come close to matching.

The Liberals have used a strong Treasury to make meaningful investments in health care, with new hospitals and expansions of existing ones occurring around the province. Meantime, the six-year peace accord the Liberals reached with the province's teachers was historic, while innovations in the classroom also deserve plaudits.

It is not like this government is entirely bereft of achievement on which to campaign.

But it has failed mightily, too – examples of which you did not find in the Throne Speech.

Perhaps in no single area has the province taken a greater step back than on the environment. Once a climate-action leader, the B.C. government has become an embarrassing slacker, with no chance of reaching its short-, mid- or long-term emission-reduction targets. The Liberals continue to live off the reputation of a carbon tax courageously brought in by former premier Gordon Campbell 10 years ago. The current iteration of his party has shown no such proclivity for that level of political gumption.

While the overall economic numbers for the province remain strong, that prosperity has not been equally shared, not by a long shot. For the most part, there are two British Columbias: the economically vibrant one in Metro Vancouver; and the other, in many parts of the Interior and the north, that is truly struggling.

Ms. Clark campaigned in the last election on the promise of a debt-free B.C. – something she said would be achieved on the backs of a thriving liquefied-natural-gas industry. Well, that has not come to pass – either the big LNG projects or the massive inroads on debt reduction. In fact, under Ms. Clark, total accumulated debt in the province has grown by more than $20-billion.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development continues to be a dysfunctional mess, according to report after report. Ms. Clark refused to make the kind of financial investment in the ministry that was needed until she was forced into it last year by relentless criticism and disturbing publicity.

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Ms. Clark's government continues to attract embarrassing headlines over the lack of rules around political fundraising. In the most recent instance, Maclean's magazine pointed out that even some of the world's most corrupt nations – such as Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Kenya – have stricter rules around party donations than B.C.

Yet, the Premier steadfastly refuses to bend to change, so overwhelming is the electoral advantage the current regulations give her party by allowing the rich to fill Liberal coffers to overflowing in exchange for unparalleled access to the Premier herself.

Everything Ms. Clark does seems calculated to within an inch of her political life. When it comes to announcements, the Liberals' overriding prerogative seems to be how they can score a political win rather than what is in the best interests of all British Columbians. The Throne Speech hinted at just such a move. "In the coming budget, your government will provide financial relief to taxpayers …"

It could be free Tim Hortons gift cards for all, or something more substantial. But you can bet it will be designed to maximize political impact in the lead-up to the May election.

And right now, Ms. Clark would appear to be a heavy favourite to reap the rewards of her political handiwork over the last four years.

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